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ABSTRACT

Perspectives on the adult nontraditional student are offered. Nontraditional students usually have multiple commitments, are not campus focused, and participate in informal learning. Needs of the nontraditional/adult learner concern the following areas: service and support, personal/social development, academic preparation, academic administrative, and academic instructional. Services that should be available at convenient hours and locations include registration, library, book store, and counseling. Personal/social development needs include the need to manage time and set goals, the need for communications skills improvement, and the need for peer support. Remedial work and study skill improvement are specific academic preparation needs, while the need for evening classes, simplified registration, and flexible curriculum scheduling are academic administrative needs of the adult student. Finally, academic instructional needs include the need for individualized instruction as well as practical learning experiences. Meeting the needs of adult students is an important agenda, since the number of persons aged 35 and over enrolled in school is projected to increase by 30 percent in the next 10 years and since in the past most academic programs have been designed to meet the cultural, recreational, and educational needs of the 18-to-22-year olds. (SW)

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ABSTRACT: "The Emerging Adult Learner - 2001"

The article looks at the non-traditional college student in regard to characteristics with particular emphasis on the needs of the non-traditional student. The areas of service and support needs; personal and social development needs; academic preparation needs, academic administrative needs, and academic instructional needs are discussed.

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THE EMERGING ADULT LEARNER - 2001

The Non-Traditional Student

American students are no longer the White Protestant sons of well-to-do fathers they once were. Of the fathers of 235 Harvard students from 1677 to 1703, the largest groups were ministers (79); merchants; shopkeepers, and master mariners (45); magistrates and lawyers (34); and wealthy farmers, military officers, etc. (28).

Colleges now serve not only the nation's sons but also its daughters, who, in 1975, made up 45% of the undergraduate enrollment. In 1974, 12% of the total enrollment was racial minorities and in 1976, 45% of the nations undergraduates were Protestant, 25% were Jewish, 5% were of other religions, and 21% stated they had no religion.

Students also are older today. Of the 28 students who entered Harvard in 1756, one was 12 and the oldest was 19; the average age was 15 years and 5 months. Of all the undergraduates in 1975, more than 30 percent were over 21 years of age.

The number of persons 35 years old and over enrolled in school is projected to increase by 30 percent in the next 10 years. A report in 1981 said 17% of people over 25 years old collected a college degree. As long as the investment in school pay off in higher wages, adult education will continue to prosper. Those colleges that successfully make the transition from young adult to adult education will have no trouble maintaining their enrollments.

It is difficult to find a definition for the non-traditional student. If you survey the literature you find such definitions as returning students, drop-outs, re-entry students, older students, and adult learners. Age has generally been used to identify this older or returning non-traditionaly student. The cut-off has ranged from 22 years of age to 30 years of age but the typical age range one finds is 25 years of age or older.

If one attempts to define the type of adult learner or the reason for their venture back into the higher education system, research has identified such types as non-directed, social, stimulation-seeking, career oriented, and life change learners. In looking at these types, one finds the life changers are very different from those with a primary goal of career advancement.

The individual interested in changing careers is one who has generally been successful in one line of work; will most likely posses the baccalaureate degree and perhaps a master's. Their goal is to train themselves in a different type of career for which their current educational experience is not applicable. An example would be a person with a Master's degree in Political Science going back for the Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

John Leach, president of Chicago Consulting Center, says technology has rendered obsolete even the skills of some younger workers, some just several years out of college. "We're talking about a society that is going to have to grapple with retraining (workers) as a major issue over the next 10 to 20 years," he said.

In 1980 with a total of 104, 7 million workers, 28% were 25-34 years old, 20% 45-54 years old and 17% 45-54 years old.

It is often at midlife that individuals tend to reappraise long-held beliefs, values, and goals concerning occupations as they relate to current interests and desires. As an individual reaches a plateau in their career and discovers they are unlikely to progress much further in the organization where they now work and are unable to obtain a comparable job elsewhere that they become interested in further education to develop new skills and knowledges.

Some individuals simply do not like their occupational roles or some of the things they are required to do in their work. To these adults, career change is their goal.

In a review of literature, one finds some common characteristics of the non-traditional student. Three of these are:

1. Multiple commitment
2. Not campus focused
3. Informal learning

The first characteristic speaks to the fact that the non-traditional student is responsible for himself or herself, and most likely directly responsible for the well-being of others, i.e., spouse and children. There is, at times, a stronger commitment to personal needs rather than the educational program.

The non-traditional student is generally not concerned about campus activities. This student fulfils several roles such as worker, taxpayer, voter, spouse, parent, etc. The family and work

environment often take precedence over the educational environment. Lack of time due to these family and work commitments form a barrier which prevents the non-traditional students from centering on campus, activities. Such a lack should not be held against this student.

The non-traditional student is influenced by informal education and bases, his/her frame of reference on life experiences and his/her work experiences. Such students often do not understand formal education and lack study and communication skills. This characteristic may be influenced by the background and age of the adult learner.

One can find sub-groups of non-traditional students in certain communities or areas. Characteristics of these sub-groups may be greater in some areas. Some of these characteritics/sub-groups are:

(1) A trend toward interest in such fields as business, accounting, and urban studies. This is the non-traditional student who desires advancement in their career.

(2) A low self-confidence about the ability to succeed in academe. The fear of not being smart enough, fear of failing, concern over ability to study and learn. This is often the minority student who never tried college before and does not feel they are equal to the demands.

(3) The re-entering woman. This sub-group exists because of the number of women leaving the

academic setting and/or the work environment for the family setting at an earlier age. Then, due to problems in the family setting at an earlier age. Then, due to problems in the family setting there is a need for the woman to re-enter the work environment. Many are single parents who have outside responsibilities, limited time for study.

Needs For The Non-Traditional/Adult Student:

To look at the needs of the non-traditional/adult learner, let's first group these needs into broad categories such as:

(1) Service and Support Needs

(2) Personal/Social Development Needs

(3) Academic Preparation Needs

(4) Academic Administrative Needs

(5) Academic Instructional Needs

Service and Support Needs: Services and support needs should be more available to the non-traditional student by changing or increasing hours or locations. Conveniences and accessability of services should have a high priority. Services referred to are services such as registration, cafeteria hours, library, book store hours, counseling, and advising. Access to existing services is a key element in the response of non-traditional students to the academic institution.

Personal/Social Developmental Needs: Some elements in this category are the need to manage time and set goals, the need for peer support, the need of communications skills improvement, the need to counter self-doubts. These needs may be met by counseling services at a time convenient to their schedule.

Academic Preparation Needs: Some elements in this category are the need for study-skill improvement, the need for remedial work, the need for improvement of test-taking skills, the need to improve concentration and memory, and the need to have academic counseling readily available. These needs can be met by the services available from a Learning Center as well as through tutors in specific courses.

Academic Administrative Needs: Some elements in this category are the need for evening classes, the need for a minimum of red tape, the need for quick and simplified registration, the need for flexibility in receiving credit, and the need for flexibility in curriculum and scheduling. These needs are in existence for the regular college student also but it is the non-traditional student who feels the impact of problems in any one of these areas.

Academic Instructional Needs: Some elements in this category are the need for an individualized approach to instruction, the need for a teaching approach other than lecture, the need for grades not only to be based on tests, the need for instructors who are interested in progress, who are relaxed and informal in the class, and the need for practical learning experiences. This last category is difficult to assess as to whether one is meeting the needs of the

non-traditional student. When one has a classroom of individuals all with different backgrounds, it is difficult to meet the needs of the entire group.

Implications For Professionals:

So, what does all this mean to us as faculty and administrators who will deal directly or indirectly with the non-traditional student or the adult student.

We must all realize that the mature student provides an added dimension to academic life plus needed financial support to the university. In some cases, this financial support area is why we need to be so concerned about meeting the needs of the adult/non-traditional student.

We need to recognize that this student body does require appropriate and flexible assistance to meet their unique needs, both psychological and academic. In the past, we have designed academic programs at the college level to meet the cultural, recreational, and educational needs of the typically aged student. Now we need to look at programs to meet these same needs of the non-traditional adult student. We need to make degree programs available through evening and weekend classes.

In the area of service and support needs, services need to be accessible to the non-traditional student. This may mean evening hours for the bookstore, lunch room, registrar's office, business office, etc. This may be registration at off hours for the non-traditional student.

Counseling services need to be available during off hours for the non-traditional student. This is possible through the use of interns. Communications skills centers or learning labs need to be accessible to those students. This also means late hours or hours on Saturday or Sunday.

Perhaps the one area we are weak in is in regard to meeting the needs of the non-traditional student is the area of academic advisement in the major area of interest. Often the faculty teaching the evening classes are part-time lecturers who have no interest in advising students and who cannot answer such questions anyway.

Another area where there is conflict as to whether institutions are meeting the needs of these students is the time classes are scheduled in the evenings or on weekends. This is a difficult problem to meet. In some instances, how this need is met will be determined by the location of the institution to the business community. If school is located 3-5 blocks from the business district, popular class scheduling hours for the non-traditional student could be 8 a.m. - 9 a.m., M W F, 4:00 - 5:15 T Th, M W, 5:30 - 6:45 M W, T Th or the usual 7 - 10 one evening. One can include classes on Saturday 8 - 11, 11 - 2, 2 - 5, and on Sunday 1 - 4.

In some areas consortiums of higher education institutions serve as a coordinating agency for such programs. A student can find needed courses at any one of the schools and have it meet a requirement at the school selected by the student to serve as his major school.

SUMMARY:

As educators and scholars and teachers, we must be concerned about the non-traditional student. From the administrative viewpoint, this represents great potential for enrollment numbers. This enrollment might not be between the hours of 9 to 4 but these individuals do pay the same tuition as any other student.

From a faculty viewpoint and from my own personal experience these individuals bring a variety of experience to the classroom upon which a faculty member can draw to add to the classroom discussion.

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